

The Rydal Academy

Rydal Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL1 4BH

Inspection dates 29–30 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Pupils' achievement requires improvement. Attainment levels in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 6 are well below average.
- Pupils do not consistently develop their basic skills of literacy and numeracy across all different subjects.
- Teaching is not always good. Work is sometimes too easy for pupils and it does not always inspire them to want to learn.
- Teachers' marking does not consistently help pupils to improve their work.
- Some pupils, mainly in Key Stage 2, are not prepared to work hard enough at their learning.
- Boisterous behaviour in the playground sometimes spills over into the classroom and disrupts pupils' learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The academy has made considerable improvements in the four terms that it has been open. This includes improvements to pupils' achievement and the quality of teaching.
- The headteacher, with the senior leadership team, has quickly put very effective systems in place to help staff and pupils to improve their work. The academy is very well placed to get better.
- Children make a good start to their education in the Nursery and Reception classes.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is good. Most pupils say they feel safe in school. The staff ensure that all pupils are given every opportunity to engage fully in school life.
- The governing body and trust directors effectively challenge all aspects of the school's work and provide high-quality support.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 28 lessons, including four joint observations with the members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors listened to pupils read and reviewed their written work.
- Meetings were held with different groups of people involved with the school. These included pupils, members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, other members of teaching staff and a director of the academy trust.
- The 14 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were examined along with the 177 responses to the March 2014 school's survey for parents. The school's website was also reviewed. The Ofsted questionnaire completed by school staff was also examined.
- A range of documents was reviewed, including information on pupils' achievements, the school's data on pupils' current progress, documents relating to planning for improvement, procedures for checking the quality of teaching, documents relating to safeguarding and records relating to behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

Barbara Hudson, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lesley Richardson	Additional Inspector
Barbara Waugh	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Rydal Academy opened in December 2012. It is a sponsored academy and is part of the Longfield Multi Academy Trust.
- It is a very large primary school. Nearly 30% of the pupils join the school other than in the Nursery.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is well above average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional funding allocated for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, in the care of the local authority or whose parents are in the armed services.)
- Since the school opened, the headteacher has created a new senior leadership team.
- In 2013 the school was the Mega Motion School of the Year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better in order to raise pupils' standards in reading, writing and mathematics by:
 - ensuring that the work pupils are given to do is not too easy
 - ensuring that pupils know how much work they are expected to do in a given time so that they all remain fully occupied with work
 - helping pupils to improve their basic skills, particularly in writing, across different subjects
 - ensuring that the marking of pupils' work is consistently good and helps pupils to improve their work.
- Improve the behaviour of pupils by ensuring that:
 - pupils understand what is acceptable behaviour in the playground
 - a small group of pupils, mainly in Key Stage 2, develop the good attitudes to learning shown by other pupils in their class.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- In the most recent academic year (2012-2013) pupils' progress was below what is expected. In the autumn and spring terms of the current academic year it is better than expected. This is because teaching has improved. Although the progress pupils make is improving, most still have a long way to go to reach the average standards for their age. This is why achievement requires improvement.
- School data and work in pupils' books show that the progress pupils make across the school is improving. The work pupils are given to do is most often matched to their ability. There are, however, times when pupils are given work that is too easy and this reduces the progress they make.
- Most children's skills when they join the Nursery class are well below those typical for their age. In the Nursery and Reception classes children make good progress. This is because teaching and activities capture their interest, so that they enjoy learning. Children make good progress in learning to read, write and understand numbers because of the effective small-group teaching and the promotion of these activities in all the activities. By the end of Reception, they are well prepared for their learning in Year 1 and, although their skills are below average, they are much closer to the expected level.
- Pupils' work and their fluency in reading indicate that they are now making faster progress in Key Stage 1. Over half the pupils achieve the expected levels in their letters and sounds at the end of Year 1. Most of the others achieve this at the end of Year 2. This is because of the good teaching of letters and sounds. At the end of 2013, Year 2 pupils were two terms below the expected levels in reading, writing and mathematics. Current pupils' attainment is closer to national averages, with some working above these.
- Pupils in Key Stage 2 are also making faster, and in many cases good, progress in reading, writing and mathematics from very low starting points, although their attainment levels are still below average. The high proportion of pupils who join the school in Key Stage 2 has an impact on overall standards. In 2013, at the end of Year 6, standards were one year below what is expected in reading, writing and mathematics. Work in current pupils' books shows that more pupils are now reaching higher standards.
- In writing, pupils' presentation and spelling continue to be an area requiring improvement because of old habits and some teachers' lack of insistence to improve. While progress in mathematics is improving, teachers, when marking pupils' work, do not consistently show pupils how to improve it.
- All groups of pupils, including the most able, are now making faster progress from their starting points than they used to because the school closely checks the work and progress of different ability groups in each class and provides additional support, such as one-to-one and small-group work, for those who are in danger of falling behind.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. This is because they receive good teaching which is well matched to their learning needs.
- Extra provision, funded through the pupil premium, has led to more staff. This enables more focused support. It also enhances the pastoral provision for those pupils and families with particular social and personal needs. As a result, many pupils supported by this funding make good progress from their starting points. In the 2013 tests, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals attained similarly to the other pupils in their class but were one year behind the same group nationally.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is improving rapidly. This is because senior leaders have focused on developing high-quality teaching through effective training, support and a rigorous evaluation of its impact on pupils' learning. Teaching staff are given clear areas for improvement, which they willingly

implement. Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together.

- Good subject knowledge is used effectively to plan tasks that build on pupils' skills and extend their learning. Most of the time, work is pitched at the right level. There are, however, times when the work pupils are given is too easy.
- Most pupils enjoy their learning and are eager to do their best. Most listen attentively in lessons and settle promptly to their tasks and try hard. Sometimes, pupils are unclear about how much work they have to complete in a given time, so some waste time and produce too little.
- Pupils' learning is most rapid when explanations grab their interest. For example, in Year 2 English pupils' enthusiasm to write a story was captured by using a letter from an author to provide them with the motivation to have a go. This simple activity made learning more relevant to pupils because they could identify with an author who had told them what he expected to find in their writing.
- Most pupils respond very positively to the well-framed questions and instructions from staff. This was very evident in Year 6 English when carefully directed pupils' discussions about the characters in a story maximised their learning.
- Pupils make most gains in their learning when they are fully motivated and interest is sustained for pupils of all abilities. This was very evident in the Nursery class when children were learning how to add on one more from 0 to 30 and the theme continued throughout many activities.
- Pupils are beginning to improve their reading, writing and mathematics skills across different subjects. Teachers, however, do not consistently expect pupils to apply the same standard of written work across all subjects, so pupils are missing opportunities to improve their skills.
- Marking of pupils' work is regular, with some examples of very specific feedback that helps pupils to improve further. This is not consistent throughout the school. Too often, pupils are not given the time to respond to the written comments and they do not follow the advice provided in subsequent lessons. Pupils' handwriting, spelling and punctuation are not as good as they should be. Even if it is corrected, there is no insistence that pupils apply their new learning in subsequent pieces of work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement. Although most pupils are well behaved and eager to learn, a small number of pupils, mainly in Key Stage 2, are not well motivated to learn.
- In lessons most pupils work cooperatively. They are respectful and friendly. Some pupils, however, lose concentration when they are not given a specific amount of work to do in a given time.
- Playtime and lunchtime behaviour is most often boisterous. Some pupils are unaware that their behaviour is unacceptable. Sometimes the boisterousness spills over into classrooms, reducing the learning time for all or some of the pupils.
- The management of pupils' behaviour has resulted in improvements. Pupils say that the whole school, including behaviour, is improving. The entries into the school's logs for poor behaviour and bullying have reduced over the last four terms. Staff react appropriately to concerns expressed by pupils and parents and usually these are amicably resolved.
- Pupils' attendance is now average and improving. The majority of pupils are punctual. Attendance has improved significantly because of the rigorous systems in place to ensure that pupils and their parents are aware of the importance of coming to school regularly and on time.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Most pupils feel safe in school and are aware of how to keep safe outside school. They are confident that if bullying should occur, the staff would ensure that this was resolved.
- Staff provide very good support and care for all pupils. Procedures to safeguard and care for all pupils are effectively followed in school. Staff are particularly good at listening to pupils' concerns and helping them to resolve their problems. Pupils are very confident that if they have a problem they can talk to a member of staff who will do their best to help.

- Most parents, pupils and staff say that pupils' behaviour is improving but it is not yet good.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is outstanding and has developed a very effective whole-school team. The excellent systems that he has put in place are driving the good progress that this school is now making. The development of the senior leadership team is an excellent example of the impact of his work. He has provided them with very clear roles, responsibilities and expectations. His excellent guidance on how to achieve the desired result has made the senior leadership team outstanding. They carry out their duties rigorously and effectively.
- Senior leaders have used their recent experiences successfully to develop the leadership skills of other staff. As a result, middle leaders provide good support to senior leaders within a variety of teams, such as those looking at the standards and quality of teaching in the different subjects within the curriculum. Together they make a strong contribution to driving up pupils' achievement.
- Exceptionally robust procedures to check the quality of teaching and the accuracy of teachers' assessments of pupils' standards and progress have been instrumental in improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement, although neither of these is yet good. Staff value the high-quality feedback from lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work and willingly try out and evaluate new ideas. The information about teaching, together with pupil progress meetings, provides the evidence for tackling variations in pupil and staff performance.
- All staff and governors are involved in evaluating the quality of education that the pupils receive. Their evaluation of how things stand is used exceptionally well to provide an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. This information provides a very comprehensive, detailed school improvement plan.
- The curriculum effectively promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and emotional development. Pupils have access to a wide range of sporting, academic and creative activities before and after school. Educational visits and visitors to the school are good.
- The new primary school sports funding is used effectively to increase teachers' skills, to provide more opportunities for pupils to partake in physical activities within the school day and to support a wide range of after-school clubs. In these sessions, pupils are encouraged to enjoy the activity, understand why physical activity is beneficial to their health and develop their interests and potential.
- School leaders and governors value the effective support provided by the trust and also the support that they have bought from the local authority. Staff value the range of well targeted training opportunities from a variety of sources, including the local authority.
- The school's relationships with parents are improving. The school works very hard to reach all parents. The pastoral support assistant is highly effective at relating to parents and keeping them in touch with activities in school. Most parents are supportive of the changes made in the school and agree that it is now improving.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body has an in-depth understanding of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve. Governors are challenging, yet supportive of the staff, and have the skills and expertise to hold leaders to account. They actively seek knowledge through reviewing data, asking pertinent questions and seeking additional advice through attending courses. Meetings focus on evaluating improvements in teaching and pupils' standards and progress. Governors use this information well to review the performance and pay progression of staff. They have a clear understanding of the school's finances, including pupil premium funding and the primary school sports funding. Governors check that this spending benefits the pupils. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet the statutory requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	138989
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	440083

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	572
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hazel Bullock
Headteacher	John Armitage
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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